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AUTHOR Bercik, Janet T.
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ABSTRACT

Teachers touching students' lives do make a difference. How they do it, what they do, and when they do it can change lives and effect change. Teachers were providing experiences, encouraging reading in a broad range of areas, and creating a feeling of importance for each child long before it became the "in" thing to do. Teachers have stressed critical thinking, opened doors to literature and poetry in unique ways, and challenged each student. They have also taught children to question and to appreciate questioning as a valuable tool in learning. The impressions these individuals make are not fully realized by students until later in life. Several teachers in particular, a reading teacher and a music teacher from elementary school and two high school teachers, serve to illustrate that "lessons" are implemented by providing knowledge that will not be forgotten. (MG)

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CHARTING THE COURSE

Dr. Janet T. Bercik

Northeastern Illinois University

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> *Pour out light and truth, as God pours sunshine and rain. No longer seek knowledge as the luxury of a few, but dispense it amongst all as the bread of life. Learn only how the ignorant may learn; how the innocent may be preserved; the vicious reclaimed. Collect whatever of talent, or erudition, or eloquence, or authority, the broad land can supply, and go forth and teach this people.*
>
> Horace Mann

Teachers touching students' lives do make a difference. How they do it, what they do, and when they do it can change lives an effect change. This was the challenge put forth by Horace Mann, and was the challenge I feel was met by teachers touching my life and others around me. Growing up in a multi-ethnic neighborhood, listening to various languages and speech patterns, and smelling the unusual food aromas emanating from the surrounding dwellings produced a wealth of experiences. Teachers teaching me, and all others in my class and school, had a veritable United Nations *before* the idea of considering children and their experiential background became the 'in' thing to do.

During my elementary years I was blessed, by in large, with good teachers who wanted successful students. Two in particular stand out in my mind--the reading and the music teacher. They worked as a team providing us with experiences and knowledge that will not be forgotten. Music and reading you say, be realistic!

Our classes were departmentalized so time was of the essence. The reading teacher stressed daily vocabulary exercises that comprised words from our reader as well as words she felt would be applicable to our future. We used these words in sentences, wrote poems, essays, and held discussions connecting these words to the world around us. We were tested weekly on these words, but they were not put on the back burner and forgotten. We had our notebook of these words and they were used repeatedly and always showed up as a 'challenge' during our weekly quizzes. Review, use, and rememberance were keys.

We had a weekly library period whereby we were encouraged to read broadly, not read 'x' number. I, unfortunately, loved the Dr. Doolittle series and could hardly wait to get my hands on the newest book. Could I sneak by and get to it? Not exactly! Keeping track of our reading habits was her favorite pasttime, and she said "Janet, before you get the latest

Doolittle book you will have to choose one of a different nature." I may not have liked it, but I did begin reading in other directions--historical fiction, nature, biographies. It taught me a valuable lesson that reading has so much to offer if one is willing to venture into the unknown. I still read Dr. Doolittle, but I learned that enjoyment could be attained from a variety of other books.

Adding to these experiences, were the extras--story box competitions, poetry writing, research reports, and play participation. We were given the opportunity to try and experiment with a variety of language skills that enhanced our self concept thereby giving everyone an opportunity to shine and learn to respect each other's talents.

The music teacher did a similar thing by teaching and reinforcing that reading was and is a part of music. We 'read' musical notes, learned vocabulary, wrote reports on famous musicians, and had opportunities to grow through various participatory activities.

Together these teachers created plays for us to share with our peers, school, and community. Those who had talent memorizing and creating another personality participated as the actors; those musicially inclined sang or played an instrument;

those who had minimal talent became the ushers, program designers, announcers, or stage and make-up crews. No one was left out and no part was insignificant. We all knew that each one was important for the final product.

At the secondary level there were many good teachers who guided me, but again two remain in my memory. The first, during the seventh and eighth grades, had my class for English, Indiana history, and geography. She stressed critical thinking, and her comment was "If you don't understand ask questions until you do or you won't learn and be successful." Our classes involved major research projects, class forums, debates, oral presentations, and writing skills development. Our fingers oft-times felt as though they would drop as we took notes in her classes, to meet the challenge of research reports on important crops, political elections, and other major projects.

The second teacher opened the door to literature and poetry in a unique manner. During our Junior year in high school many students did not want to read poetry or the classics. She chose to enlighten and challenge us with her outlook and background of the times. She caused us to think and above all question. Along the way we learned that no opinion or interpretation was insignificant, and everyone had a right to

voice theirs.

The impressions these individuals made upon me was not fully realized until I had been teaching for many years and began taking graduate classes. As a matter of fact, I am still realizing the value of their lessons as I grow and experience in the field of education. As university instructors began talking about 'new ' reading techniques, the importance of self concept, the experiential knowledge base for students coming into our classrooms, and the development of the whole language approach, I realized that the teachers of my youth had implemented these approaches and they had already become part of my teaching.

As I reflect upon my classroom I realize the daily reading, to my children, the vocabulary challenges, the special reading tub I developed comes from those early years. The constant questioning by me of how and why evidenced in my lessons, reflects upon my learning experiences. To this day I always tell my students to question if they don't understand, that no question is 'too dumb' only the person who doesn't ask questions is.

These teachers poured out their light of knowledge to me and many others. Now I am able to do likewise, and for this I extend my thanks. As Theodore Roosevelt said, "Every man owes

something to the upbuilding of the profession to which he belongs." I know these teachers did that and I hope to carry this forward to others with whom I interact.